United Nations S/2018/71

Security Council

Distr.: General
31 January 2018
English
Original: Arabic

Identical letters dated 28 January 2018 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

On instructions from my Government, I should like to convey to you the position of the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic regarding the forty-seventh report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015) and 2332 (2016) and 2393 (2017) (S/2018/60).

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic reiterates the concerns that it raised in its responses to previous reports of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the aforementioned Security Council resolutions. Regrettably, the current report does not meet its goal, namely to give Member States an impartial, objective and professional briefing on the humanitarian situation in the Syrian Arab Republic. The Syrian Government emphasizes that the authors of the report must comply with their mandate under the aforementioned resolutions of the United Nations, all of which underscore the principle of respect for the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic and the need to provide humanitarian support to all Syrians in need, without politicization or selectivity.

From 9 to 14 January 2018, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Mark Lowcock, made what has been described as a positive visit to the Syrian Arab Republic. The Syrian Government hopes that the visit will bring tangible results by maintaining dialogue, rebuilding confidence and fostering cooperation between the Syrian Government and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). Such cooperation should recognize the challenges faced by the Syria State and seek to support its considerable efforts in the area of humanitarian affairs, relief and development.

The following are some of the Syrian Government's main concerns regarding the current report:

- The language of the report continues to lack the necessary professionalism, objectivity and credibility. It is highly politicized and beholden to the agendas of parties hostile to the Syrian State. Inaccurate accounts, such as references to the dropping of barrel bombs from helicopters, are presented as though they had been confirmed. The crimes of terrorist organizations are dampened with such terms as "reportedly", "reports have been received" and similar phrases.
- The Syrian Government rejects the inclusion in the report of false information and inaccurate statistics from sources that are unreliable and egregiously politicized. These include the reports from the Office of the United Nations High

Please recycle

Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), which are fundamentally based on slander and allegations made by members of armed terrorist groups and their families. OHCHR has wilfully ignored the horrific destruction and human and material damage caused by the operations of the so-called international coalition and its allied militias in Raqqah and Dayr al-Zawr. This shows that it has lost all credibility. The Syrian Government is surprised that the authors persist in ignoring reliable Government sources and the reports of United Nations representatives, organizations and agencies operating in Syria, all of which acknowledge the efforts of the Syrian Government, its cooperation on humanitarian relief and the facilities that it provides for their work.

- The Syrian Government regrets that the Secretariat and the authors remain silent while the funding for humanitarian activities allocated to Syria has been deliberately reduced with catastrophic consequences, and while certain States have made their support contingent on political conditions that are inconsistent with the principles of humanitarian work. The resulting situation is one of the main factors preventing humanitarian access to Syrians in need, and it has brought an end to a great many projects. For instance, owing to the deliberate funding cuts, the World Food Programme has reduced the number of Syrian recipients of food parcels from 4 million to a mere 2.8 million. Over a million people in need are being denied food. International non-governmental organizations have also scaled back their activities and assistance projects in Syria owing to donor pressure.

- The recent escalation of the situation in the eastern Ghutah has taken place because the terrorist groups positioned in the area have been attacking residential areas and military checkpoints. They have launched hundreds of rockets and shells at the city of Damascus, killing dozens of people. Government forces have had to respond to those acts of aggression because they have a constitutional duty to ensure that civilians are safe and secure.

- Regrettably, the authors have persisted in using the term "besieged locations" when referring to the situation in the eastern Ghutah. At the same time, under pressure from influential States on the Security Council and beyond, they have persistently and wilfully ignored the plight of the people of Fu'ah and Kafraya, which are besieged by armed terrorist groups. The fact is that the people of the eastern Ghutah are besieged from within by an assortment of armed terrorist groups, which are using civilians as human shields. The groups have seized and monopolized humanitarian assistance, which they hand out to their supporters or sell at exorbitant prices to people in need, as also happened in the eastern neighbourhoods of Aleppo.

- It is unfortunate that the authors have ignored the plight of the abductees in the prisons of the eastern Ghutah and in other areas where terrorist groups proliferate. These include women, children and old people who were taken from their homes and places of work and subjected to the worst forms of torture. The authors fail to press for those people to be evacuated so that they can receive the medical attention they need. The Syrian Government wishes to correct a glaring mistake in the legal language used by the authors in paragraph 7 of the report: the people held in Tawbah and other prisons in the eastern Ghutah are abductees, not captives.

- The report acknowledges that the United Nations has successfully delivered humanitarian assistance to millions of people in need within Syria. The Syrian Government emphasizes that this could not have happened but for the facilities provided by the Syrian State and its institutions.

- Regrettably, the authors have persisted with their glaring legal error of referring to the armed terrorist groups in Syria as the "non-State armed opposition", as

evidenced, for example, in boxes 1 and 3 and in paragraphs 8, 23 and 29. The Syrian Government forces' operations in the Hamah countryside and in Idlib are aimed at the camps of the terrorist groups Nusrah Front and Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and the terrorists and forces that fight alongside them.

- Unfortunately, the authors have once again attempted to spread false information by persistently focusing only on the humanitarian assistance convoys deployed by United Nations agencies. They ignore the convoys deployed in cooperation with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and other actors, including the International Committee of the Red Cross. They also ignore the humanitarian assistance provided to hundreds of thousands of beneficiaries by convoys independent of the United Nations entities, not to mention the assistance delivered by international non-governmental organizations and their national partners.

- The people running OCHA have been unable to maintain the standards of transparency and provide the guarantees necessary to reassure the international community that assistance is going to the rightful beneficiaries rather than to the armed groups. In paragrapn 33, the authors unfortunately refer to the same vague ideas that appear in previous reports of the Secretariat concerning so-called partners and independent third-party companies contracted by the United Nations to verify that assistance is reaching the right storage facilities and recipients. Such ideas and references are unacceptable. They have not previously been brought up by any United Nations official with the Syrian Government, which is the primary party concerned. They also flagrantly contravene Security Council resolution 2165 (2014). The people who propagated and implemented those ideas bear full responsibility at the international level. The Syrian Government once again demands that the United Nations should supply it with the names and records of the parties that are supposed to be acting as United Nations partners. It also looks forward to the information and clarification that the Secretariat was requested to provide under Security Council resolution 2393 (2017).

- The Syrian Government once again urges the Secretariat to work to bring an end to Turkey's blatant attacks on Syria. Most recently, Turkey raided the Syrian town of Afrin, resulting in dozens of innocent victims to date. The Syrian Government once again calls on the Security Council to fulfil its responsibility by bringing an end to this act of aggression and ensure that Turkish forces withdraw from Syrian territory.

- The Syrian Government categorically rejects the authors' continued bias in favour of the so-called international coalition and its members. The authors fail to mention the coalition's own acknowledgement that these strikes have caused hundreds of civilian deaths. The report furthermore avoids holding the coalition to account for the destruction it has inflicted on the city of Raqqah, for the massacres it has committed there and for its use of internationally proscribed weapons in Syria, as well as for other violations of international law, international humanitarian law and human rights that constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity. The Syrian Government again calls for the immediate dissolution of that illegitimate coalition and an end to its crimes against Syrians.

- Notwithstanding frequent calls from the Syrian Government and members of the Security Council, are unfortunately still failing to fulfil their responsibility to give the global public a true picture of the economic and humanitarian suffering caused by the unilateral coercive economic measures imposed on Syria by the United States of America, the European Union and other States. Those measures have had numerous adverse consequences, especially in the health care sector, affecting even the activities of United Nations agencies and foreign

non-governmental organizations operating in Syria, and have led to the suspension of projects vital to responding to the needs of Syrians.

- The Syrian Government reiterates that that United Nations officials working in Syria should have nothing to do with any separatist entities, illegal "local councils" or unlicensed civil associations. It rejects the authors' failure to acknowledge the serious crimes being committed by separatist militias supported by the forces of the so-called international coalition in areas where they are deployed in the North and East of Syria. Those violations are set out in the Syrian Government's response to the forty-sixth report of the Secretary-General.

- There are now 27 international non-governmental organizations authorized to work in Syria. The Syrian Government is convinced that the Syrian civil society sector has a role to play. It has therefore informed United Nations officials of a new mechanism that regulates and seeks to promote cooperation between international organizations and Syrian civil associations. The mechanism seeks to promote such cooperation. It includes all declared Syrian organizations in Syria, once the cooperation projects have been duly examined.

- The Syrian Government reaffirms its position concerning the International Criminal Court and the calls made for the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic to be referred to that Court. It stresses that the jurisdiction of the Court does not apply to the situation in Syria and, moreover, that the Court has lost all credibility and has been transformed into a political tool used by certain parties to attack specific States for sordid political ends that have nothing to do with the requirements of justice. The Syrian Government also reiterates what it stated in its letter to the Secretary-General regarding the serious legal flaws in the resolution on the so-called International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Those Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011 (A/71/799).

- The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic reaffirms its long-standing position that the crisis in Syria requires a political solution based on intra-Syrian dialogue under Syrian leadership without foreign intervention and without preconditions. We remind you that the success of the political process and any significant improvement in the humanitarian situation will depend, above all, on creating a climate conducive to a serious and non-politicized international and regional commitment to fighting terrorism. The Syrian Government also stresses that it has played a constructive role in the success of the Astana and Geneva meetings and that it will attend the Syrian national dialogue congress to be held in the Russian city of Sochi.

- The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic once again calls on the Security Council to prevail on the States that support and finance armed terrorist groups to refrain from so doing, in implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions on combating terrorism and the financing thereof, in particular resolutions 2170 (2014), 2178 (2014), 2199 (2015) and 2253 (2015). Compliance with and enforcement of those resolutions is the key to resolving the situation in Syria and delivering unprecedented humanitarian assistance to those in need in Syria.

I should be grateful if the present letter could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Mounzer **Mounzer**
Chargé d'affaires a.i.